

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

April 29, 2005

The Week Ahead

Mon., May 2 – The Commissioner attends the open house for New Visions Youth Development Center in Nashville.

Tues., May 2-Wed., May 3 – The Commissioner attends the regional administrator meeting in Nashville.

Condolences

- Charles R. “Bob” Ables, the *John L.* contract attorney at Taft Youth Development Center, died Wednesday, April 20, 2005, in a Chattanooga hospital. Mr. Ables was a native of South Pittsburg, and he practiced law at his office there for many years. He served as Marion County Juvenile Court Judge from 1980-90 and also served as City Judge for the cities of Kimball, Tracy City, Monteagle and South Pittsburg. He was a graduate of the University of Chattanooga, now University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville Law School in 1965. Mr. Ables held the *John L.* contract at Taft for many years and has given legal advice and assistance to many youth placed there. He loved working with the kids at Taft, and his cheerful presence and thoughtful advice will be missed.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Rada Belle Edmonds Ables, two daughters and two granddaughters. The family has asked that memorial contributions be made to the South Pittsburg Lions Club, South Pittsburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church or your favorite charity.

- Dr. Betty A Perry, psychologist at Woodland Hills Youth Development Center, passed away on April 25, 2005. Dr. Perry became employed with the department in March 1987 and has been instrumental in working with youth all over the state of Tennessee. For several years, she worked out of Central Office and effectively served as the liaison with the Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation, Department of Education and the Department of Health. She ensured that emotionally disturbed, mentally ill and mentally retarded children were correctly identified and referred to receive appropriated services. Dr. Perry was reassigned to work with the students at Woodland Hills in the spring 1998. She was

responsible for monitoring schedules of services provided by mental health contractors and did on site mental health crisis interventions. She demonstrated an understanding of her role as it relates to interaction with superiors, subordinates, and always treated employees with dignity and respect. Both staff and students will surely miss her devotion and sincerity.

New DCS Communications Director

Rob Johnson will be joining DCS as communications director on Monday, May 2, 2005. Johnson joins the department after working as a reporter for *The Tennessean*, covering courts and other issues. During his 20-plus year career, Johnson has also worked at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal*.

Andrea Turner, who has served as communications director for DCS since August 2004, will be joining the Department of Health in the same position, effective May 2, 2005.

Please take a moment to welcome Rob Johnson to the department.

Bulletin Board

The new Dickson County Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is participating in the Old Timer's Day parade on Saturday, May 7, 2005. DCS employees are invited to watch and participate in the parade, which will begin at Dickson High School, 509 Henslee Drive, in Dickson. People who participate will meet at 9 a.m. in preparation for the parade, which kicks off at 10 a.m. and ends around noon. For more information, call Debi Thomas at (615) 293-8304.

Taft Students Get "Taste of the Wild"

Submitted by Carol Muscarnero, Personnel Analyst, Taft Youth Development Center

Students and staff at Taft Youth Development Center were honored to have Joey Wray with the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency visit for a program on April 20, 2005.

Officer Wray brought in the "Partners in Education" trailer, on which there were many mounted mammals, fish and snakes, accompanied by interesting facts about each.

Officer Wray also presented a slide show titled "Snakes of Tennessee". He dispelled many myths about snakes and explained the benefits we get from them. He also explained the difference between poisonous and non-poisonous snakes and showed a live King Prairie snake that students got to touch and see up-close.

He also brought a wild cat that had been captured that morning. Officer Wray explained the importance of protecting our wildlife. All live animals they use in demonstrations are returned to a natural habitat area after a few days.



Officer Joey Wray holds the King Prairie snake, allowing a student to get a close-up look and feel.

Coming Your Way – The May TNKids Release

Submitted by Cynthia Vaughn, Director of Budget and Planning, Office of Information Systems

The next release of TNKids will be ready for use on Monday, May 9, 2005. What's in it for the field staff? Here are some highlights:

Case Recordings – These will now print in the order you have chosen. In addition, “Family” will be added to the list of person(s) contacted. You will no longer have to choose “Others ” when recording a family member as a contact. Also, if you add a person, it will “stick” in that drop down list for a period of one year or until the case is closed, whichever comes first.

Addresses – Case managers will be able to disconnect an incorrect address from a case and then select or enter the correct address. Also, TNKids will now capture the “removal address” for a custody client.

Data Correction – How many times do you see multiple records for the same child? The new TNKids will provide a means to associate duplicate cases to a single “master” case. If you see any of these cases on your person searches, contact your field system administrator right away to start this process.

Alerts – Alerts Manager will allow employees to create and save custom sorts and filters in the Alerts Manager window.

Mass Case Assignment – Team leaders will love this new feature, which will allow you to re-assign cases all at once instead of one-by-one.

Notice of Action – TNKids will automatically generate the Notice of Action form and e-mail notification to TennCare advocates regarding the NOA.

Well-Being Services – A new icon will be available for FSS Funding Units to use to record any funded purchase.

IV-E Language – Child welfare benefits counselors will be able to record whether or not a court order contains the required language for Title IV-E funding eligibility.

What about the other problems with case recordings? We heard you loud and clear, and changes are coming. Some of the issues will be addressed in the May 9 release (such as printing improvements), and the remaining issues are being worked with plans to implement corrections within a few weeks.

This release of TNKids has been put through test-driven by 56 case managers, team leaders, child welfare benefits counselors and field system administrators. For seven days, these staff members tested the new TNKids application using their own data to discover and report any glitches. Our thanks go to these field staff for their efforts to make this a smooth TNKids implementation.

Naturally there will be questions and problems when everyone starts using the new TNKids. For best results, please contact your local field systems administrator. If they don’t know the answer to your TNKids question, they will follow up with OIS for you. If you’re not sure who your FSA is, click on the following DCS Intranet link:
<http://www.intranet.state.tn.us/chldserv/tnkids/FSAsSortbyRegion04-13-04.pdf>

Juvenile Justice: Change for the Better

Submitted by Jacqueline A. Lee, Director, Juvenile Justice Community Services

Having worked for the Department for many years, I have had the opportunity to see changes in our work with the delinquent youth. I started working for the agency at a youth development center (YDC), when it was the Department of Correction (DOC). The philosophy was to lock up youth in secure facilities, primarily using a punitive type of system. Although the Individual Program Plan (IPP) was in place, most youth were placed in a secure youth center with little or no work with the family.

After a few years, I became a probation officer. This gave me an opportunity to see things from a different perspective. I did do some family work, mainly talking to parents. Most parents seemed at a loss as to what to do with their children's behavior and were open and receptive to any help they could get. At this time, we became the Department of Youth Development. This enabled the youth we served to be the number one priority for our department. Our focus was still primarily the same as when we were with DOC; however, more opportunities opened up for alternative placements for youth. The community residential facilities worked with youth in neighborhoods, placing youth in public schools and giving them an opportunity to work and learn alternative ways to live without crime. The youth center had vocational programs, offering skills for the future.

Juvenile justice foster homes were recruited. The Mid-Cumberland region had a very successful foster home program for delinquent youth, primarily due to the work of Servella Terry, who utilized ties to her church to recruit foster parents. This program was successful due to the family-like atmosphere all of the parents promoted. They helped one another with respite care and called each other for support. Weekly group meetings were held for the students and the parents. Foster parents invited birth parents to their homes for meals & holidays gatherings, which strengthened the youth's support system. Foster parents mentored birth parents and gave them a true peer as a support system. Birth parents continued to contact foster parents once the youth returned home for support.

Many of the youth we served in this program went on to become successful members of society. I remember one youth in particular who made Clarksville his home, finished college and found a well-paying job.

Family work was not a priority in the Department of Youth Development, and we were often dismayed to return youth to the same environment, which negated all of our hard work. We thought we had no other choice.

When we became the Department of Children's Services (DCS) in 1996, new options emerged. We were no longer competing for resources with the Department of Human Services. New placement opportunities were available. The Child and Family Team concept was introduced. Many juvenile justice case managers had very positive experiences with this process. It just makes sense to engage families to solve their own problems; we are not experts in fixing families, but we can help. Many have the ability to repair their own lives with a little assistance from us.

Another benefit of DCS has been the ability to allow youths to return to us for assistance once they leave our supervision. Often youth realize after they leave us that they are not as grown up as they think they are. Everyone needs someone in his or her corner. Doesn't it make sense that the delinquent youth would need this almost more than anyone else? Youth do need adults to call once they are out on their own. Think of your own experience of coming of age, in your early 20s. Didn't you call your parent or other support person to help with questions about finances, how to cook and shop? I called my family for recipes and to ask for assistance on life skills well into my 20s. I think we forget that youth who break the law are teenagers who need help. If they do not have a viable family, they all need an adult in their life who can serve as a support person to simply make a telephone call to ask a question.

One area I would like to see improve is the foster home aspect of treatment. I encourage the regions to recruit foster parents specifically to parent the delinquent youth. Research has shown that foster care is one of the most effective treatments in working with delinquent youth. This was demonstrated in the program we did in the 1990s in Clarksville. Enabling foster parents to work as a team with this population has proven a wonderful strategy. Workers can spend time on other things while the foster parents support one another. The most important aspect is that it really helps reduce recidivism.

In my humble opinion, we have made many positive strides in the arena of juvenile justice since becoming DCS. I would hate to see us revert into a system of punitive punishment, which doesn't appear to work. The youth we serve can get what they need in DCS; is it really necessary for a name change and for my resume to say I worked for one more department when I have not moved in the past 23 years? What would we do differently if we became a new department? Think about it.

I challenge the foster parent recruiting staff to find people out there who are willing to share their lives with these youth and to commend the juvenile justice staff in the field for their hard work and dedication to these youth.

The Southeast Region is Enthusiastic About Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Submitted by Elaine Hong, coordinator, Continuous Quality Improvement (Chattanooga)

The Southeast region, under the leadership of regional administrator Sandra Holder, and Elaine Hong, CQI coordinator, continues to blaze new trails with their CQI projects. We began our CQI projects in October 2004 and have had six months of progress. Although some staff were reluctant at first, their enthusiasm has won over and they are now sold on CQI and its benefits.

The Southeast region has 20 teams that meet on a regular monthly basis. Each team is responsible for brainstorming new ideas to solve performance issues in their team. The only guideline set for them is that their projects need to be "performance" issues. They

have been very creative and driven to improve certain areas that they feel are weaknesses on their teams. There has also been an element of competitiveness amongst the teams that has urged them to excel. Our teams have many interesting projects that range from improving morale (which also improves production) to developing protocol for new employees.

We have a CPS group working on developing an extensive resource manual for the counties that they serve. They have secured maps of the counties, prepared booklet that include a copy of all forms used by CPS, a training “cheat sheet” that will guide you through every aspect of an investigation and a CPS care kit. The CPS care kit includes alcohol wipes, latex gloves, two rolls of film, four batteries, hand sanitizer, a note pad, pens, pencils, sharpener, ruler, band aids and, most importantly, chocolate candies for the long road trips that catch you unprepared. These will be distributed to each employee and to each new employee upon arrival. New employees have seen this project as very beneficial and have been appreciative of the support of them. New employees should feel less of a sense of being lost with this handy new tool.

We have a team that has established a “brag board” to give each other an encouraging word or a word of thanks for a job well done. This may seem small, but there are few people who do not like to hear praise for their efforts. This brag board helps to accomplish this and helps to increase morale in the county office. On my last visit in this office, the brag board was full of “Thank You”, “Pat on the Back” and “Great Job”!!

We have teams that are working on projects to reduce the amount of time spent in court. For them, and for many others, this is “down time”, and they feel that reducing the amount of time spent waiting on cases to be heard will increase the amount of time they can spend with their families and children they serve. “Kudos” to those who want to place our families first.

We have one team working on securing educational records in a timely manner. This can be a problem in our region in the smaller counties where our schools are understaffed. They are moving forward with this and making progress and are hopeful that a resolution will be reached. They understand that our children’s educational records are a vital part of our assessment process.

Our CPS teams are developing a log to track the amount of children kept out of custody, children coming into custody, whether it is a drug case, if a safety plan or plan of action was done, if services were placed in the home, if the child was placed in a relative’s custody, and how many children were in the referral. They have worked with our legal department on this log and will be able to pass this information on to several disciplines to help track our referrals, families and children. We may also want to incorporate this into our needs assessment planning.

Our adoption/recruitment team has an outstanding project underway. They plan to purchase a video camera to be used to make videos of children in guardianship. These videos will be used in training new foster parents (PATH) and also shown to prospective

adoptive parents. They have knowledge of a national movement that is occurring now called Heart Gallery (photos designed to touch the heart) and are making plans to move forward along the same lines through their CQI teams. They are hopeful about the adoptive placements for our children that should be forthcoming following their initiatives.

Our resource team is working on a CQI project to address moving our children placed outside of their home county back into their home county. This will require some moves, but it will benefit our families in many ways. Visitation for families should be easier, children will be in familiar surroundings and, hopefully, children will be able to attend the same school system. They are also targeting our counties that have contract foster homes but have no vacancies for our regional children. Our resource unit will definitely be tracking the types of homes we need and will work to alleviate problems in this area.

We have some teams working on reducing caseloads by securing safe placements with relatives or returning them to a safe home in a timely manner. They continue to emphasize the importance of family and those connections.

We have teams that are working on a protocol to get EPSDTs and dentals completed in a timely manner. This team has gotten our three-year-olds in to see the dentist, which was not an easy task in our region.

Our team coordinators are working on reducing our backlog list and targeting any recurrent delays in permanence for children. Our team leaders are targeting any cases where a child has been in custody over one year.

We sure have been busy and will continue to be busy. It is clear that the staff in the Southeast region wants to put their best foot forward and help the families and children that we serve. We are taking different paths than in the past; we are trying new things; we are empowering our Level 1 teams to be problem solvers and we are working on issues that have kept our families and children from reaching permanency timely.

Core Leadership

Core Leadership
April 26, 2005
Debra Valentine, Presiding

This week's Core Leadership meeting focused on the Monitoring Report of the Technical Assistance Committee (TAC) in the case of Brian A. v. Bredesen, which was released on April 13, 2005.

Commissioner's Comments

In the letter DCS received from Children's Rights, Inc. (CRI), the overarching theme is that the agency is behind on data. The Commissioner gave CLT members a take-home test on the Monitor's Report to be turned in on Monday, May 2.

Monitor's Report

Specific issues discussed in the monitoring report included the following:

- **Placement Process, Page 60:** *Redesign placement processes to integrate assessments, matching, utilization reviews, and resource expertise into a unified placement system (by April 2006).* **Action step:** Suzanne White is having a meeting with Frank Mix, Judy Cole, Randal Lea, Jacqueline Lee and Landra Orr next week to discuss data needs, functional assessment integration and moving forward in the two pilot areas. White will also develop a high-level graphic of best practice unified placement process by July 1, 2005, with a goal to present the unified placement process to the Technical Assistance Committee (TAC) by end of June.

The Commissioner stated Debra Valentine and Audrey Corder did an excellent job of graphing the contract-monitoring piece last week. The Commissioner stressed that we need to understand how contracts are managed, since 50 percent of our work is done through contracts. Another next step is to develop a cross-agency business process analysis with Finance and Administration, and re-design for the contract process.

- **Reducing Trauma to Children, Page 61:** *Develop and implement protocols to reduce trauma experienced by children during the transition to placement (by August 2006).* **Action step:** Bonnie Beneke will complete the final literature review about trauma reduction on May 15, 2005. Suzanne White, Randal Lea and Judy Cole will integrate this information into the placement process. This would be incorporated in the Hamilton County pilot project.

Training and CPS have an important role. A small workgroup will be formed around trauma reduction. In addressing children's clinical issues broadly, a group comprised of those addressing trauma reduction and the unified placement process will be pulled together. This issue also involved a cultural shift in the regions regarding trauma reduction in removals. Eric Henderson will be responsible for ordering *A Child's Journey through Placement* and *Signs of Safety* for various staff members to read and discuss.

- **Quality Visitation, Page 62:** *Implement quality visitation for children in custody and the frequency of such visits (worker-child, worker-family, family-child, and sibling) sufficient to meet the requirements set forth in the Settlement Agreement (by March 2006).* **Action step:** Elizabeth Black is the lead and will provide an update in mid-July update.
- **Psychotropic Medication, Page 63:** *Psychotropic medication, restraints and seclusion.* **Action step:** For Little Planet, the contract is signed and a target set for deployment of training. A final product should be developed in three and a half months. The consortium will provide behavior management training.

- **In-House Schools Evaluation, Page 65:** *Completion of In House Schools Evaluation. Action step:* MTSU has worked on the scope of services. The next step is meeting with Andy Shookhoff. The evaluations will also focus on youth development centers and juvenile justice facilities.
- **Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Home Development and Support, Page 67:** *Implementing regional foster care and adoption recruitment and retention plans. Action step:* Dual certification process complete as a key component of infrastructure in this area; the link connecting TNKids Financials and Chipfins so that no resource parent will be paid without approval of homes. FHACP will not be de-commissioned in 05/05 build.
- **Relative Placements, Page 70:** *Improved utilization of relative placements. Action step:* Policies have been revised. Some regions have been doing the training. The Commissioner wants a 30 percent placement rate.
- **Resource Development, Page 72:** *By August 2005, DCS will have a fiscal management plan to maximize resources needed to implement the Path to Excellence and the Brian A. Settlement Agreement and begin securing necessary resources. Action step:* The AGAPE contract will be signed today. Outcome measures for private providers are in place now.
 - **Page 73:** *By July 2005, DCS will identify cultural and demographic resource barriers and increase its capacity to provide services in rural jurisdictions. Action step:* Regarding rural service delivery, Kent Berkley has completed literature review. He and Judy Cole are working with rural RAs, with a target date of June 2005. Also, the Committee on Multi-Cultural Affairs will be presenting at the CLT retreat in June. William Haynes will provide agendas and minutes from these meetings to the Commissioner.
- **Quality Assurance, Continuous Quality Improvement and Data Management, Page 78:** *By April 2005, DCS will have the information, tools and capacities needed to implement quality assurance and continuous quality improvement activities and processes. Action step:* The first critically important strategy is the implementation of a data management plan to support the collection, improvement and use of data on key indicators of progress. Rhonda Simpson will be the lead.

CRI Letter

The CLT members were given a copy of the CRI letter that outlined follow-up items from the April 13, 2005 compliance meeting. CLT members discussed the letter and were identified as the lead for the identified follow-up items.



Live out of your imagination, not your history. –Stephen Covey

It's kind of fun to do the impossible. –Walt Disney